

Amendments to the Claims:

Listing of Claims:

1-16 (canceled).

17. (currently amended) A method for machining a plurality of workpieces with a laser beam, comprising:

providing a lower pressure plate having a plurality of movable support segments for supporting a plurality of workpieces to be machined, wherein the support segments are flat or punctiform or include both flat and punctiform, and are movable independently from each other vertically relative to the lower pressure plate;

providing an upper translucent pressure plate whereby the lower and the upper pressure plate are movable vertically toward each other;

~~pressing the workpieces arranged on the support segments towards the upper pressure plate with a desired contact pressure by moving the lower pressure plate and/or the support segments respectively vertically towards the upper pressure plate;~~

selectively pressing the plurality of workpieces arranged on each of the plurality of movable support segments one after another against the upper pressure plate by moving the respective movable supporting segment in a vertical direction in accordance with a desired contact pressure, wherein only the respective workpiece pressed towards the upper pressure plate is exposed to a laser beam; and

passing a laser beam from above through the upper pressure plate onto the plurality of workpieces to machine same.

18. (canceled).

19. (cancelled).

20. (previously presented) The method as claimed in claim 17, wherein the plurality of support segments include individual segment regions movable independently of each other in a vertical direction and are pressed against the workpieces with a desired contact pressure.

21. (previously presented) The method as claimed in claim 17, wherein the plurality of support segments is moved simultaneously in a vertical direction until contact occurs between the workpieces arranged on said support segments and the workpieces are pressed collectively against the upper pressure plate with a first contact pressure to clamp same, and for machining the workpieces with the laser beam a second, substantially higher contact pressure is applied in turn selectively to the respective workpiece exposed to the laser beam.

22. (previously presented) The method as claimed in claim 17, wherein, after the laser beam machining, substituting a second identical lower pressure plate fitted with unfinished workpieces to be machined for the lower pressure plate.

23. (previously presented) Method as claimed in claim 21, wherein the lower plate is provided on the underside with a compressed-air connection and arranged on a base plate with a compressed-air counterpart and pressed against the base plate by the force of the contact pressure pressing the workpieces

against the upper pressure plate, and the compressed-air connection is sealed thereby.

24. (previously presented) Method as claimed in claim 22, wherein the lower pressure plate is provided on the underside with a compressed-air connection and arranged on a base plate with a compressed-air counterpart and pressed against the base plate by the force of the contact pressure pressing the workpieces against the upper pressure plate, and the compressed-air connection is sealed thereby.

25. (previously presented) The method as claimed in claim 17, including inserting a translucent elastic plastic film between the upper pressure plate and the workpieces.

26. (currently amended) A device for machining a plurality of workpieces with a laser beam, comprising:

a lower pressure plate having a plurality of movable support segments for supporting a plurality of workpieces to be machined and on an underside a compressed-air opening that is flush with a corresponding compressed-air opening in a base plate, wherein the support segments are flat or punctiform or include both flat and punctiform, and are driven separately from each other and movable independently from each other vertically relative to the lower pressure plate;

a translucent upper pressure plate, whereby the lower and the upper pressure plate are movable vertically toward each other;

a laser for passing a laser beam through the upper pressure plate onto the workpieces;

a pressure generator acting at least at one of the pressure plates for biasing the pressure plates toward each other; and

means for moving the movable support segments independently from each other vertically with respect to the lower pressure plate, wherein the workpieces are pressed one after the other or simultaneously against the upper pressure plate at a desired contact pressure,

wherein at least two lower plates are provided which are brought alternately into pressure contact with the upper plate,

wherein the compressed-air opening in the lower plate is designed as a through bore, and the compressed-air opening in the base plate is designed as a bore with a counterbore for holding a seal.

27. (previously presented) The device as claimed in claim 26, wherein the lower pressure plate includes a pressure chamber for receiving compressed air for moving one or more support segments in the vertical direction.

28. (cancelled).

29. (previously presented) The device as claimed in claim 26, wherein the lower pressure plate includes individual resiliently mounted workpiece supports, and the pressure plate is movable in a vertical direction by a pressure generator.

30. (cancelled).

31. (cancelled).

32. (cancelled).